DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 317 FL 017 293

AUTHOR Greenfield, Gerald Michael
TITLE Internationalizing the Business Curriculum at Small Colleges: The Introductory Seminar Approach.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 13p.; In: Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions. Conference Proceedings; see FL 017 281.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration Education; Curriculum Development; Global Approach; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; International Studies; *International Trade; *Introductory Courses; Second Languages; *Seminars; *Small Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *University of Wisconsin Parkside

ABSTRACT

The University of Wisconsin-Parkside offered an experimental course on international business in seminar form as a means of trying an interdisciplinary venture in a new area without commitment to a course structure. The seminar was developed as part of the international studies program, which draws on existing courses in several disciplines, and first offered as a senior special topics seminar in business management. It was designed by the international studies program director and a marketing professor, taught by a specialist in Latin American history, and had a large number of guest lecturers from many disciplines and businesses. The seminar had two main components, the first communicating key social and behavioral science content critical to handling international business, and the second consisting of business topics. Each participant completed an independent research project in his major area of interest, addressing the topic in an international context and with a multidisciplinary approach. The program was well received by faculty, guest speakers, and students. Problems encountered included logistical challenges, difficulty in keeping continuity despite many changes in lecturer schedules, and the diversity of student backgrounds. New perspectives were gained on the use of diverse resources for such an internationally oriented course. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED293317

Internationalizing the Business Curriculum at Small Colleges:

The Introductory Seminar Approach

Presented to the Sixth Annual Conference on Languages and
Communication for World Business and the Professions.
May 8, 1987 Ann Arbor, Michigan

Gerald Michael Greenfield

Director, International Studies

University of Wisconsin-Parkside

FL017293

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Voght

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Infusing business curricula with international perspectives has become an increasingly important objective for colleges and universities throughout the United States. As the global economy exercises formative power on national-level business enterprise, the rhythm of domestic economic growth reflects a wide range of international developments--both economic and political, and the United States cedes some of its status as a hegemonic power to nations in Western Europe and Asia, it becomes impossible to train a new generation of business leaders without recognizing and emphasizing the critical significance of global awareness.

Unfortunately, not all colleges and universities boast the resource base of faculty expertise needed to establish a truly internationalized business curriculum. Holders of advanced degrees in international business are not plentiful. Business faculty trained in traditional programs often lack the broader perspectives needed to establish international courses in their specialty--for example, offerings in international finance or marketing. Moreover, because of supply/demand imbalances, many smaller colleges and universities cannot fill all the basic business area positions, and must rely on temporary instructors. Finally, in many cases suspicion--if not outright antagonism--between departments of business and those in the liberal arts and sciences (often arising out of pronounced salary and student credit hour disparities) reduces the possibility of cooperative programming or team teaching, standard ways of sharing scarce expertise among programs.

This paper reports on an experimental course at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside offered through the program in International Studies as a means of responding to various of the problems mentioned above. This Seminar in International Business brought together faculty members from Business, Social Science and Humanities, as well as area executives involved in international business operations. It provides an example of resource maximization that enabled the first offering of an international business course at the university, while providing a forum for cooperation among faculty members who ordinarily had little interaction with each other. And, while not an unqualified success pedagogically, nor totally satisfying to students, the course did prove rewarding to all participants, and also had some unanticipated positive outcomes. The remainder of this paper will briefly discuss and evaluate the course emphasizing its development, format, and content. First, however, a short description of the UW-Parkside situation will provide some background for understanding the way in which this course reflected practical campus-level realities.

Founded in the late 1960s, the University of Wisconsin-Parkside enrolls approximately 5000 students and has some 170 full-time faculty members. The Business Division generates around 40 percent of the campus' student credit hours and accounts for 25 percent of all majors. Originally separated from the College of Arts and Sciences as the main component of a School of Modern Industry with its own Dean, in the mid-1970s

such distinctions were abolished and Business became one of the eight broad divisions in a unified structure. This reorganization, inspired in part by financial considerations, was also designed to promote interaction between business faculty and those in the arts and sciences.

Despite what appears as a unitary structure, in many ways business remains isolated, and a measure of hostility characterizes the relations among the business division and other campus units. For example, in recent years business has been advocating the necessity of hiring a Dean and constituting the division more as a separate school, asserting that these steps are important to its credibility in the region's business community and would more accurately reflect its unique problems and potentials. Other campus units object, seeing business as already absorbing a disproportionate amount of campus resources, and receiving special dispensations for its students--as for example in the waiver of the college's foreign language requirement.

Hostility arises over issues of compensation in that business division salaries greatly exceed the campus average. Indeed, newly-hired Assistant Professors in business, still completing their doctorates, command higher salaries than many tenured full professors in the arts and sciences. Also reflecting a very different job market, business faculty enjoy far more mobility than their arts and science counterparts. Turnover in the Business Division is considerable, and many

faculty positions remain unfilled despite almost continuous search and screen. Furthermore, while many campus programs have serious problems attracting students and are accordingly feeling pressured to raise enrollments, the Business Division enjoys a high ratio of full-time faculty to student credit hours (FTE/SCH), a critical administrative indicator for measuring the health of a program. The fact that the business program at Parkside requires its majors to pursue a 67 credit course of study further exacerbates the credit hour disparity. It is not untypical for faculty members in the arts and sciences to bemoan such enrollment patterns and express despair about the narrow career orientation of contemporary students, as well as about the "imperialistic" attitude of the business division. Implicit in this critique is a sense that business students are less intellectual and cultured than those electing to major in the arts and sciences, and that the business division is requiring an inordinate amount of course work so as to monopolize the credit hours generated by their large number of majors..

The reason for rehearsing these tensions is to explain and underscore the point that cooperation, and--in some cases, mutual respect--among arts and science faculty and those in business does not characterize the campus. As such, the international expertise of area and language specialists has typically found no expression in the business program. And, reflecting perhaps these existing tensions and antagonisms, business students typically elect a minimal number of courses outside of that area,

while arts and science students only rarely take electives in business.

Given this situation, the International Studies Program was well positioned to help develop a course in international business. To begin with, the Program major largely is composed of existing courses from a wide variety of disciplines, and virtually no faculty members have direct appointments in International Studies. As such, the Program does not compete for credit hours or open faculty positions. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary International Studies Steering Committee from its inception had representation from the Business Division. Steering Committee members regularly work together on projects, and the "internationalization" of the business curriculum was seen as a natural area for collaborative efforts. Finally, the development of a minor in International Studies designed specifically for students majoring in business had received considerable discussion within the Steering Committee.

With this propitious background, the Director of International Studies and a Professor of Marketing collaborated on the design of a Seminar in International Business pilot-tested at the Senior level as a special topics course in Business Management during the Fall Semester, 1986. Several features of this course merit discussion.

The Seminar was coordinated and partially taught by the Director of International Studies, a specialist in Latin American history. This provided a degree of service to the business

division in that since it often experienced difficulty covering all of its required courses, it was not in a position to release a faculty member to assume major responsibility for an experimental offering, especially one likely to have a relatively low enrollment. In essence, therefore, the Seminar came at no cost to the business division. At the same time, arts and science faculty members also saw a benefit to having the Director in a position of authority in that it proffered the inclusion of non-business perspectives and faculty in the course.

To maximize existing resources, the course design called for a large number of guest lectures from faculty members in business, communications, geography, economics, and political science. It also sought to bring in area business executives who had personal experience in international business. As a whole, then, the course would expose students to multidsciplinary perspectives and combine the insights of academicians and practitioners. Additionally, it was planned at an early stage to use several of the Going International videotapes to compelling demonstrate the complexities of doing business internationally and the need for some specialized training.

Broadly viewed, the Seminar had two components. The first communicated key social and behavioral science background seen as critical to the "tool kit" of practitioners in the international field. Thus, a political scientist discussed the structure and dynamics of the international political system; an economics professor focused on comparative economic systems; a geographer

outlined major world regions and identified the criteria used to identify and describe them; a communications professor discussed the field of intercultural communication; and a historian presented an overview of the major processes and patterns in twentieth century world history.

The "business core" comprised the second component, with most of the major business areas receiving discussion. To orient non-business majors, this section began with an overview of business as an academic field, which identified and defined its subdivisions. Lectures by participating business faculty members addressed marketing, finance and accounting, personnel, and management. In each case, lectures discussed these fields in an international context stressing those aspects which demanded special attention or treatment when enterprise was not restricted to the domestic setting. Thus, such topics as management style, exchange rate fluctuations, labor problems, and the need for cultural awareness in marketing strategies were highlighted.

Lectures by international business executives also formed part of this component, though in practice, the discussions invoked the entire range of course material. Participants included a Director of International Personnel and a Vice President for Corporate Planning, Development and Acquisitions from S. C. Johnson, a Manager for International Business Development from Modine Manufacturing, and an International Economic Analyst from First Chicago Bank. In addition to focusing on their current area of specialization, business

executives also discussed their education and the career path which led them to their present positions. They also advised students as to the general background and specific skills that would be important for people who wanted to work in international business.

The last aspect of the course was an independent research project in which students were to pick a topic related to their major area of interest or specialization, and discuss it in an international context, using multidisciplinary perspectives. This provided an opportunity for students to employ the course's general approach in the analysis of a topic in which they had some expertise, but in a more traditional context.

The International Business Seminar largely proved successful, whether measured by student evaluation or by the response of the participating faculty and business executives. However, as befitting an experiment, it also had its downside. Annoying, though by no means devastating, were the logistical difficulties presented in scheduling lectures. This was especially so for the business executives; their schedules remained subject to sudden change, so that far more than in most classes the course syllabus suffered alterations and mid-course corrections.

Perhaps the most problematical area was the difficulty of assuring continuity, given the large number of outside lectures and frequent changes in the established order of topics. The course's instructor attended all presentations, and tried as much

as possible to highlight the relationships or common ground among them. Nonetheless, there was a certain disjointed flavor to the entire endeavor, and for neither the students nor the instructor did the course emerge satisfactorily as a cohesive whole. A related difficulty was the shot gun effect of dealing with so many topics. Students learned a little about a great number of things, but not a great deal about anything in particular. While this is perhaps a quality inherent to all survey courses, it seems less tolerable in a senior seminar.

Diversity of student backgrounds, while in some regards a strength, also exercised a negative impact. For the ten students who registered for the course majors were: business (5) international studies (3), economics (1), and Spanish (1). The non-business majors all had some difficulty dealing with the business core, while the business majors had a similar experience with the social science and humanities perspectives. At the same time, for their fields of specialization, both groups found the elementary concepts presented inadequate or boring. Also, in general, students responded most favorably to instructors from their own or allied subject areas; the converse also held.

These difficulties acknowledged, in an overall sense the Seminar largely proved enlightening and stimulating. Business majors came to see the relevance of broader understandings from the social and behavioral sciences, while non-business students gained a greater appreciation for the nature of business as a field of study. And all students were forced to come to terms

with the realization that an insular and eurocentric orientation characterized most of their education. The importance of foreign language ability and an awareness of one's own culture and sensitivity to that of others also was underscored, especially by the business executives. Those practitioners also stressed the importance of a well-rounded educational background in that one's business counterparts in many other societies would expect to converse about a wide range of subjects before proceeding to business negotiations.

Moving from the classroom to institutional concerns, the Seminar had several positive impacts. Simply by reading the syllabus, the various participating faculty members gained some insight into the relationships among their fields. And, in most cases, faculty members were forced to cast their presentations in a manner more directly related to either business or international issues, thus further fostering an appreciation for the scholarly fields of colleagues from other departments.

The experience of actually listing an international business course, albeit experimental, helped spur business faculty members to consider designing some specifically international courses. Thus, not at all coincidentally, plans now are well under way for offerings in international marketing and finance. In addition, the possibility of developing an international business module for the freshman level introduction to business also has received discussion. Significantly, given the problems alluded to at the outset regarding mutual antagonisms among professors from

business and arts and sciences, this international module will provide lecture opportunities for non-business faculty members. An additional serendipitous outcome was the very positive response of area business executives to both the invitation to participate and the actual experience of speaking to the class. Thus we have discovered a promising venue for tapping valuable expertise, promoting greater appreciation in the business community for the university's programs, and providing a valuable opportunity for students to interact with working professionals.

The International Business Seminar will require considerable revision to devise a more satisfactory and viable format. Positioning of the course also remains in doubt, for as a general introduction, it might prove more appropriate at the sophomore level. In this regard, any definitive judgement of the course's degree of success would be premature.

However, even at this early point, Parkside's experience with this approach suggests that the promotion of international perspectives for business students can be undertaken in the absence of business faculty specifically trained in international areas. It also demonstrates the potential merit of an incremental approach that takes small initial steps that do not require substantial funding or elaborate curriculum revisions, and then builds on their positive outflows. Finally, it supports an eclectic approach that seeks needed expertise throughout the university, rather than just within departments of business, as well as in the local business community.